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ABSTRACT

To determine if the greater the degree of personal or social control the individual experiences, the less likely it is that he or she will behave in a deviant, delinquent manner, 257 male and 229 female high school and introductory-level college students residing in rural Tennessee were group-tested by their instructors during regularly scheduled class periods. Various measures, scales, and tests were used to study eight independent variables. Fathers' occupational and educational attainments, birth order, and peer ties were seen as measures of social control which the individual cannot alter. Self-esteem, anomie, deviance proneness, and perceptions of legally attaining societal values/goals were viewed as a personal source of control over one's intentions and actions. The dependent dimension was a measure for self-reported delinquency admitted to by subjects for the year preceding the survey date. Results indicated that deviance proneness was reported less by females than by males and less by subjects whose fathers had attained higher educational and occupational levels; perceptions of greater achievement opportunities were associated with higher self-esteem scores and with fewer instances of reported delinquency. As hypothesized, personal control factors accounted for most of the variance in reported delinquency, and of the variables contributing least to an explanation of delinquency, four were social control factors. (NEC)

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DELINQUENCY AS A FUNCTION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONTROLS

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DELINQUENCY AS A FUNCTION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CONTROLS

Introduction

In our "deviance" research we often pay no more than lip service to a basic, Durkheimian-like principle we teach our Introductory Sociology students: namely, that the ultimate "social glue" that keeps the human enterprise from fragmenting into deviant and unrecoverable bits and pieces is personal (internal) and social (external) control (cf. Durkheim, 1951; Henry & Short, 1964; Nisbet, 1953; Parsons, 1951; Reckless, 1967). And of these two sources of control, personal controls are said to be the mainstays of cultural normativeness. Perhaps one reason that such little emphasis gets placed on the "controls" concept is that sociologists subconsciously see it as far too simplistic a notion to carry the heavy burden required of it in explaining, say, delinquency as one form of deviance. Perhaps another reason accounting for the relative lack of overt reliance on "controls" as a dimension causally associated with delinquency is its Freudian-like, psychoanalytic flavor suggesting the rather sociobiologically inborn propensity of human beings toward anti-social expressions. This latter view is of course quite non-sociological.

Whatever the reason(s) for it being done, by not explicitly identifying our "causal" variables more in terms of controls, we may be failing to come as directly to grips with various forms of deviance as we otherwise might. What we are suggesting with our present effort is that the "controls" perspective may conceptually and methodologically channel our efforts at understanding deviance in ways that will prove more fruitful than the efforts that are guided by such perspectives as "alienation," "social class," and

"self-esteem." More often than not we may indeed be looking, with our research, at some of the most causally salient variables. But because of their being fitted into a less than totally appropriate ideological paradigm, their most parsimonious relationship to delinquency may often be going largely unrecorded.

With our present exploratory work we are taking such "old wines" as anomie (Merton, 1938), perception of opportunity for achievement (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960), and sex (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) and "pouring" them into the "new bottle" to which we tentatively affix the "controls" label. In our view, such variables as "anomie" and "perception of limited opportunities for achievement" are more than impotent states of psychological resignation; they directly represent a lack of <u>personal control</u>. By the same token, being, for example, socially and/or genetically defined as a female in our culture directly represents individual subservience to <u>social control</u>. The greater the degree of personal or social control the individual experiences, the less likely it is that he or she will behave in a deviant, delinquent manner. We further hypothesize that delinquency will be accounted for to a greater degree by <u>personal</u> than by social control variables, the general rationale being that any controlling effects the social environment may have on behavior must--first and last--be "filtered through" the individual's psychological reception/reactance system made up of such dimensions as values, perceived opportunities, self-esteem, deviance proneness, etc.

<u>Method</u>

Tested were 257 male and 229 female high school and introductory-level college students, of whom 449 were white and 34 were black. All resided in

rural middle-Tennessee and were group-tested by their instructors during regularly scheduled class periods.

As part of a larger survey, the students responded to one-item measures for their fathers' (1) occupational and (2) educational attainment levels and for (3) their own birth order (cf. Kelly, 1975; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). All three of these dimensions were seen as measures for social control, i.e., as "social facts" which the individual cannot have altered. A fourth variable was a 20-item scale for self-esteem (cf. Tangri & Schwartz, 1967), a factor which was presently defined as more of a personal than social source of control over one's intentions and actions. Also contained in the questionnaire were 5-item measures for (5) anomie (defined as the relative lack of personal control) and (6) peer ties (seen as a form of social control) (cf. Winslow, 1967; Cohen, 1955). These scales were followed by (7) a 3-item test for deviance proneness, i.e., the tendency to say "yes" to such hypothetical questions as "Suppose a friend of yours wanted you to do something you knew was wrong—would you do it?" (cf. Han, 1971). This variable was defined as a personal control factor. To tap the (8) subjects' perceptions of not being limited in their chances of legally achieving selected societal values/goals, responses were obtained to a 15-item values scale (cf. Landis, Dinitz, & Reckless, 1965). Finally, the dependent dimension in this study was made up of (9) a 20-item measure for self-reported delinquency admitted to by the subjects for the one-year period preceding the survey date (cf. Winslow, 1967). Step-wise regression analysis was the principal means used to determine the statistical associations between the independent and dependent variables.

Results and Discussion

The relative strengths of the personal and social control variables as predictors of self-reported delinquency are given in Table 1. There it is seen, as was hypothesized, that of the four personal control factors, three of them were among the five variables accounting for most of the variance in reported delinquency. Correspondingly, of the five variables contributing least to an explanation for delinquency, four were social control factors.

Two additional items of information providing suggestive support for the reliability and validity of the present results can also be noted. First, we see in Table 2 that the dimensions selected as appropriate for a study of delinquency were generally intercorrelated in theoretically expected ways, with, for example, (1) deviance proneness being reported less by females than by males and less by subjects whose fathers had attained higher rather than lower educational and occupational levels, and (2) the subjects' perceptions of greater achievement opportunities being associated with higher self-esteem scores and with fewer instances of reported delinquency. Second, the mean scores given in Table 1 for such delinquency-related variables as deviance proneness, anomie, perceived opportunities, and self-esteem were precisely those expected for subjects reasonably assumed to be quite normative in their attitudes and behavior, i.e., high school and college students socialized in a religiously and politically conservative section of Tennessee. Thus, the predicted associations observed between the independent and dependent variables for these particular individuals would likely be even stronger for subjects scoring as less normative on such "causal" dimensions as were looked at in this study.

We think it is especially noteworthy that deviance proneness, a personal control variable, accounted for such a large amount (30%) of the total variance explained by the 10 independent dimensions included in this study. And that these variables collectively accounted for 36% of the variance in self-reported delinquency scores is similarly a relatively unique finding in delinquency research--indeed, in the social science literature in general.

It is our concluding recommendation that delinquency and perhaps all other forms of deviance be expressly studied from the "containment" perspective of personal/social control. If, for example, we define our individual variables according to this criterion we may more closely approach a "total" explanation for delinquency. In this connection we would also recommend the closer analysis in future research of the interactive effects--perhaps sometimes complementary, perhaps sometimes not--between "personal" and "social" controls, looking closely to see when the one becomes the other and when, together, both become something else. The virtually galloping rate at which societies are increasingly threatened by the incidence of illegal, delinquent behavior demands serious study--and more study and still more study. It's inconceivable that we can know too much or that we can be harmed by knowledge overlap.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Independent Variables and Their Regression and Correlational Association with Self-Reported Delinquency

	Mean	R	R^2	r	p
Deviance proneness (range 3 to 15)	4.50	.55	.302	.55	.01
Anomie (range 5 to 10)	2.37	.58	.338	.24	.01
Sex (male = 1, female = 2)	1.53	.59	.353	-.18	.01
Perceived opportunities (range 15 to 45)	37.65	.60	.363	-.17	.05
Father's occupation Prestige score (range 9 to 82)	42.52	.61	.367	.01	n.s.
Race (white = 1, black = 2)	1.06	.61	.369	.04	.05
Peer ties (range 5 - 25)	13.02	.61	.370	-.05	.05
Birth order (range 1 to 4)	2.84	.61	.370	.07	.05
Self-esteem (range 20 to 100)	70.78	.61	.371	-.12	.05
Father's education (range 0 to 20+)	11.76	.61	.371	-.06	n.s.
Reported Deviance (range 20 to 80)	8.95	.61	----	----	----

Table 2. Correlation Matrix Linking the Independent and Dependent Variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 = deviance proness	.09	-.11	-.09	-.05	-.04	.01	.12	-.05	-.11	.55
2 = anomie		.01	-.17	-.07	.14	-.18	.12	-.32	-.14	.24
3 = sex			-.03	-.02	.06	-.12	-.03	-.09	-.01	-.18
4 = perceived opportunities				.11	-.01	.14	.00	.36	.11	-.17
5 = father's occupation					-.12	.10	.03	-.02	.49	.01
6 = race						-.08	.02	-.04	-.11	.04
7 = peer ties							-.10	.08	.07	-.05
8 = birth order								.03	-.03	.07
9 = self-esteem									.06	-.12
10 = father's education										-.06
11 = reported deviance										

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